Black History Month: Xbox Ambassadors Share Their Stories

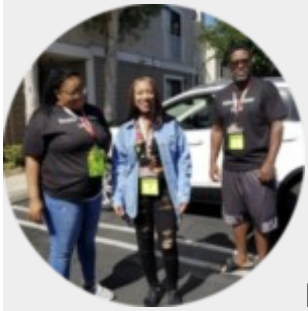
Community Fifthpaw Feb 1, 2021

It’s February, which marks the start of **Black History Month**! Highlighting and amplifying community voices is core to the Xbox Ambassadors community. So, in celebration, we asked those who identify as Black/African American how games with diverse representation have impacted them and to share their own stories about being a member of a gaming community.

We received hundreds of responses and, with much consideration, selected the following to share.

Here are their stories:

Voldette1



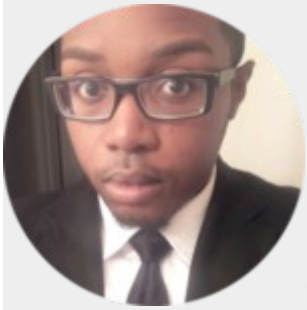
For a long time, I would get so excited to play new games in general. But as I grew older, I realized my connection to games wasn’t as strong and I knew it was because I was missing something. No matter what types of games I played there was nothing that I could actually relate to. For

a while, *Tomb Raider* had my interest but there was no one my race whether it be a male or female.

But one of my favorites was *Saints Row* and it wasn't because of the main character but one of the supporting characters. Her name was Aisha and three reasons why I related to her were that she was an African American female, she sung and had the same name as my baby sister. Whenever my dad played Saints Row and the song "Bounce like my checks did" it was a mini concert in our living room. Even now, writing that brought a smile to my face. It helped me embrace my love for video games and my love for seeing my fellow brother and sisters enjoying the art of video games.

As a black female gamer the gaming industry has opened so many doors for myself and others. I have become friends with people from all over the world. It has also helped with my relationship with my dad and me and my sisters enjoy video games more than our brothers. My dad has been playing video games for 30+ years and he introduced them to me when I was a young girl. I cannot wait to start a family and show my children all of the retro video games that I've played throughout my life.

Onjrae



I don't think a lot of people really understand how important it is for character representation to have Black characters in video games. From what we saw from the release of the Marvel *Black Panther* movie, having a positive, strong, and not stereotypical Black character is important because it gives people an opportunity to see themselves in the character and really dive into the story. I have two nephews (ages 3 and 6) and they are so excited to be able to see themselves in the characters that we play as in video games.

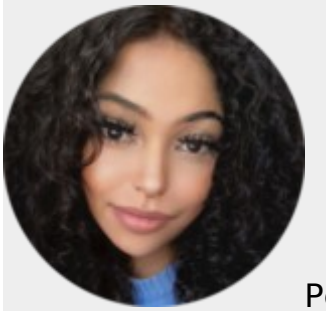
I was babysitting for my sister last year and decided to introduce the boys to Xbox for the first time. At the time, I was playing *Soul Caliber 4*, letting the boys make their own characters. They were so excited to see "themselves" in the game. I told them that they could be anything that they wanted to be, and their eyes lit up with excitement. After I dropped them off at my sister's they talked about the games and how excited they were. My sister called to ask me some questions and she was able to then get them their own Xbox! My older nephew is now using games as a way to practice reading. He would

be in normal classes if it wasn't for COVID, but my sister is so happy that they were introduced to a way to learn, have fun and, most importantly, build confidence!

Gaming communities are surprisingly aware of a lot of things that are happening in our world. We have an opportunity to speak to people from all over the globe and it really opens up a conversation to talk out misunderstandings. I have been able to create many long-lasting friendships from these interactions. For example, five years ago, I started playing *The Elder Scrolls Online* and I have been able to connect with people from different walks of life. I have been an Xbox gamer since I was 12, so I have really grown with the community and I love the fact that we support each other.

Xbox has also opened my eyes to look for ways to support other groups in my real life community. In the wake of the George Floyd protests, there were a lot of people online sharing their opinions and I was able to not only have very constructive conversations but was also able to make some more friends. Having a safe platform to have fun and communicate today is a blessing to say the least. I think it helps make us all better for one another.

OofBunny



Personally, I feel more Black female protagonists (and protagonists of color, for that matter) should be available— and there shouldn't be much debate about this. There are fun games like Telltale's *The Walking Dead* series, available across all platforms, including mobile, that feature Black girl protagonists that make the experience all the more fun and engaging!

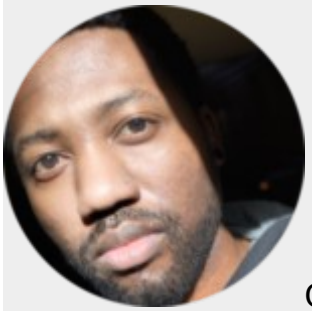
In The Walking Dead: Season 2 you play as Clementine, an 8-year old Black girl who becomes the driving force behind Telltale's franchise. Clementine has to be one of my favorite characters of all time. Despite everything she has endured thus far, she's still alive. She has what it takes to survive and at her young age, that's admirable.

My experience in gaming communities has been very mixed. I'm an admin, alongside a great team on a wonderful Xbox discord. It's the most welcome I've ever felt in a community. There's no judgment, everyone's friendly, no

one cares about your gender or the color of your skin— we're all the same and I love that. As gamers, we should all be under one banner but we're not and thus us POC, especially women, do get treated differently.

You don't hear a lot about Black gamers and when you do they're mainly male, so the representation of Black girl gamers matters so much. It's important that every person, and every identity has the chance to look around and feel that they're not alone; to know that there are others like them doing the same things they do. Black girl gamers are competitors, we're mobile gamers, we're FPS gamers, we're adventure gamers and we're part of any other gaming genre you can think of. We're here, we game just as hard and we're here to stay.

AfroPrnce



Gaming has always been a big part of my life, even at a very early age. It wasn't until I become an adult that I realized the impact of placing ourselves into different worlds has on us as individuals. The moment my representation became important and impactful to and for me, was when games like *Watch Dogs 2* decided to make the main character a person of color. In that game I saw myself. An African American techie, sarcastic Robin Hood. I played the mess out of that game because of how representation made me feel.

Ubisoft may not have known it but they made that game for me. I realized the impact when I had a Marcus wallpaper as the background on my computer and my son pointed and said "Daddy?"— he had to have been about 1. But even his brain somehow connected the two. I'll forever love representation of all kind. Everyone deserves to feel as if they're loved and cared enough about to be someone's main character.

With everything going on in the world it's easy to assume or fear racism. There's no avoiding it, but only in gaming have I been able to experience a world where a lot of the time people don't see color. Being able to meet a stranger, share some laughs, "good game", uplift each other over something basically non existent, will always remind you that there's some time, love and patience in this world… even if you can't see it.

Even in console wars, the color of your skin doesn’t prevent another user from jumping to your defense. Sometimes, even for dumb reasons, you share a common interest.

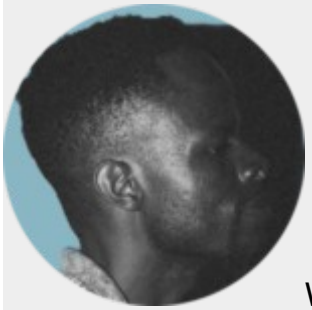
TatyHybrid

As an African American woman, I find that it’s difficult to find characters of color in older video games. However, I am happy to say as time has changed, I can see characters that look and talk like me. This helped me escape into my video games because I can connect and relate to my characters.

Yes, my friend for many years on Xbox had made a comment after I purchased a DLC character that she just knew that I would buy that character the second it was released because the character looked just like me. Apparently I always chose the characters who look more like myself!

Gaming communities have been a big impact on my teamwork and game play. I found myself gaining more confidence to speak to people even if I cannot see them face to face.

SibuMaxhita

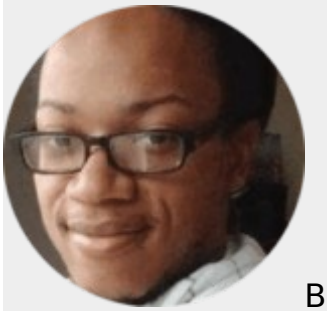


We draw our inspirations from our experiences and being able to see the progress of a character of my own color was the most amazing thing in gaming that could have ever happened to me, because gaming goes beyond characters’ skin color and gender. I’ve always loved gaming but as an arcade kind of thing— I never thought I would one day own a console. I visited a friend when he was playing *Far Cry* with a character that looked like him. He then explained that the character can even be a woman and that’s what sparked my interest in actually owning a console.

After that, I bought myself an Xbox One. I further learned that I could create an avatar that resembles me for the whole gaming community to see. I've always found it hard to fully represent myself as a disabled person with an in-game avatar as I was born with one right arm. I felt that Microsoft was aware of my presence and that made me an active member of the community, even going so far as to join the Ambassador program to keep up with the latest developments. It's nice to see that gaming companies are aware of the system's bias and we have come a long way since then and I hope changes like these keep coming.

Gaming communities have also been empowering for me. For a lonely kid growing up in big schools crammed with sports stars and bullies, they are a means of making friends and becoming a part of something exciting and fulfilling. I found new friends and learned more about other cultures from across the sea.

EmeraldSage8



Being able to create and play Black characters in video games (other than violent, gang-related stereotypes) has slowly, but surely, helped me feel more comfortable in my own skin. I used to make characters of any other race and was more than happy with them for the longest time because I couldn't live life feeling like I was Black. I felt like it was some type of sub-race or culture because of how the topic of equality was treated when I was growing up. As I got older, I realized that equality in general was a difficult topic for most people to live with unconditionally.

Because of that, I began working on my own miniature social experiment on myself focusing on my self-confidence. I began creating Black avatars in video games, and making the elected decision to consciously play a selected title if a protagonist was African American. Overtime, I noticed that my personal ability to interact with people while being conscious of the fact that I'm an African American either by conversation or context was a lot easier to manage. Before, I was unable to see past the skin once it was mentioned, I had to throw in a bad joke or witticisms just to make myself feel better.

Seeing the difference between who I was in high school and who I am now, I'm happy and thankful to be in the skin that I'm in. I know it doesn't define me and I can say that confidently.

Gaming communities have given me a place to go when people in my life dried up and were nowhere to be seen when I wanted to play. I've always enjoyed being able to play online ever since Xbox Live first came out.

WelTrainedTazer

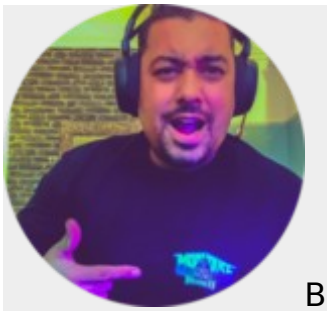
In terms of representation of Black characters in video games, Lincoln Clay from *Mafia 3* is one I would like to mention. As an African American with a Nigerian background, Black history has always held a certain special place in my heart. Being first generation American, I know that American Black History isn't exactly MY history but a part of it in some distant way. And I always knew I had to learn and understand it for what it was to show true honor for those who paved a way for me to even exist in this country. Being a history buff, the Mafia games were always a fun ride since I could live out the stories of Mafia gangsters back in the day.

When Mafia 3 was announced and I saw the main character and the setting of New Orleans, I was beyond ecstatic because a game developer I loved wasn't only just making a new game, but one dipped in a piece of Black culture here in America. Particularly the mission where you had to investigate the supermarket to see exactly what was going on (mind you, history is history good or bad) and coming across a rendition of an underground slave trade.

Being able to then take it down brought a sense of not just accomplishment but also self assurance or perhaps even a sense of gratitude to the simple fact that such was no longer our reality thanks to leading Black figures like MLK, John Lewis and Malcolm X.

Gaming communities have shown me that it's not just your select few stereotypical "gamers" that play games— I have met moms, grandparents, leading figures, and even mentors just by join a community and have made friends with almost all of them!

MDH BigWorm



Being one of the 3 Black kids in school when it came to sports— especially football—I was always among the last picked. Then one day *Jordan vs. Bird: One on One* was released, opening my eyes to basketball, and I joined the local basketball team and met my now lifelong friends. I became captain of the school team and alongside that, also the person to start the team selections— no longer being left last. And obviously hip hop had a strong relationship with basketball in particular, so I eventually got into that as well.

I run an Xbox Facebook Group and honestly have made some of the best friends. We have friends in the US, Holland, UK, Belgium, Africa and we host game nights and support each other through life's hardships. I can turn to these guys, gals, and transgender friends for anything. Whenever one of the members can't afford a game or subscription or their controller or even their Xbox breaks, somebody will step in to help them out. It's such a great community and Xbox players and the Xbox community are just the best.

"My great grandfather from Barbados in 1907 with my great gran in the front row centre, with my gran, then a baby, on his knee. As you can see, this was a very rare Black and white marriage."

“This is my gramps Les who was sunk by a German U-Boat off the coast of great Britain. He was rescued at sea after then met my gran. And the rest is history.”

Thank you once again to everyone for sharing their stories this Black History Month! We understand it is not always easy to share personal experiences publicly, so we really do appreciate every single one.